

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMLAND PRESERVATION ADVISORY BOARD

DRAFT Minutes of Meeting
December 2, 2013, 9:30am
CT Department of Agriculture
Large Conference Room
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman George Hindinger, John Guskowski, Henry Talmage, Joe Bonelli, Paul Larson, Robin Chemser, George Malia, and Ben Freund.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Terry Jones, Jim Zeoli, Lucy Nolan, and Jim Krissel.

ALSO PRESENT: For the Department –Commissioner Reviczky, Bureau Director J. Dippel, Property Agents Katherine Winslow and Denise O’Meara; Others –Lisa Bassani of Working Lands Alliance.

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Chairman Hindinger called the meeting to order at 9:35 am.

II. REVIEW OF September 16, 2013 MINUTES

The minutes of the September 16, 2013 meeting of the Farmland Preservation Advisory Board (Board) were distributed and approved (Guskowski-Larson, Unanimous).

III. BUSINESS:

1. Commissioner’s update

A. Governor’s Council for Agricultural Development. Talmage indicated that the Governor’s Council second annual report is in the final stages, and will be out in time to be submitted to the next Legislative session. Talmage added that one of the recommendations is for the Council to be comprised of four focus groups, one to concentrate on Food safety certification and marketing. Hindinger stated the Governor’s Council, currently comprised of twelve different groups, is too many, and by combining the groups into four major areas, will allow to be more concise with combined efforts.

2. State Owned Farmland. Hindinger stated that the October 2013 meeting at Farm Bureau targeted three state-owned properties to seek permanently protecting agricultural land, located at Savin Farm, Lebanon; Fairfield Hills, Newtown; and CVS Hospital, Middletown. Bassani, of Working Lands Alliance, indicated that the WLA goal for this year is to permanently protect Savin Farm, Lebanon, with the goal of performing a study next year as what could be done to protect the agricultural land in Middletown, Newtown, and some Department of Correction State-Owned agricultural lands.

Director Dippel discussed a map handout regarding current Department of Agriculture Leases on State-Owned Land, and preserved Farms in CT. Dippel presented a power point presentation targeting seven state-owned farms, which have current leases for agricultural production, and discussed the history and status of the leased farms.

- 3. Farmland Preservation Programs updates & summaries.** Director Dippel discussed the pending and closed farms to date. Dippel indicated that there are currently 58 farms in the pipeline for a total of 7,031 acres, with five farms already closed this year, 13 farms pending closing, 8 farms with offers extended, 13 farms being appraised, and 15 farms under negotiation and configuration.

Dippel stated the reason for the low number of farms having closed is directly the result of trying to partnership with the USDA-NRCS Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program. Dippel indicated that the requirements of the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, now administered from Washington, have become excessively burdensome and redundant and have severely hindered the Program's ability to close on farms. Dippel stated that an Agency policy decision has been made to change focus from seeking partnership with the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program, to now be State-only deeds, in order to be able to close on farms in a timely manner. Commissioner Reviczky added that the manner in which the Federal Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program is being run, has created tremendous obstacles for the Farmland Preservation Program, which already adheres to stringent criteria and requirements based on quality control. Reviczky stated that these imposed obstacles by USDA have hurt the mission of the Farmland Preservation Program, and have severely hindered the overall process of being able to preserve farms.

Dippel also discussed the status summary of the Community Farms Preservation Program, indicating that eight farms are in the process of completion, for a total of 405± acres, for a total cost of approximately \$2,585,360.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS:

- 1. 2014 Board meeting schedule.** Dippel discussed proposed 2014 Advisory Board meeting schedule as noted:

| DAY | DATE | TIME | LOCATION |
|--------|--------------------|--------|---------------------------|
| Monday | March 3, 2014 | 9:30am | DOAG Lg Conf Rm |
| Monday | June 2, 2013 | 9:30am | Htfd Regional Mkt or TBD? |
| Monday | September 15, 2013 | 9:30am | TBD – Farm visit? |
| Monday | December 1, 2013 | 9:30am | DOAG Lg Conf Rm |

2. **Lisa Bassani, Working Lands Alliance– summary of Farmland Access Forum-** Bassani indicated that a number of key stake holders attended the Forum to discuss farmland access and farmland affordability. Bassani discussed a few items that were considered to be addressed going forward. Items of discussion related to finding a way to keep agricultural land in production, if a property is sold, with a possible option to purchase at agricultural value, or the right of first refusal under a voluntary covenant; a match link program to link farm seekers with farm owners, which would require staff and funding due to a high level of engagement and research; and ideas to create tax incentive models and affordable housing for new beginning farmers, who are now tending to seek smaller farms for more diversified farming.
3. **Advisory Board Membership.** Freund indicated that a meeting should be dedicated to address the Board's membership. Hinderger stated that a possible yearly March meeting could be dedicated as an Advisory Board organizational meeting.

V. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Next meeting, Monday, March 3, 2014, 9:30am, Department of Agriculture, Large Conference Room. The meeting was adjourned at 11:40 am.
(Malia/Bonelli- Unanimous).

Respectfully submitted by Denise O'Meara. Date: December 4, 2013